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February 3, 2016

The Honorable R. Gil Kerlikowske
Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20229

Dear Commissioner Kerlikowske,

I write to request your assistance in supporting the Festival of Pacific Arts (FESTPAC) in Guam and ensuring that adequate Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers are deployed to Guam to support the large visitor arrivals expected during the festival. This event will bring thousands of international visitors to Guam and I hope that CBP will have the resources necessary to accommodate the increased demand during FESTPAC.

FESTPAC is a quadrennial event that will take place in Guam from May 22 – June 4, 2016. The event will bring together representatives of 27 Pacific Island nations and territories, along with about 2,500 cultural performers, artists, and cultural practitioners to share and exchange their unique culture and traditions. In addition to FESTPAC participants, the Guam Visitors Bureau (GVB) and FESTPAC organizers anticipate that 10,000 supporters will also visit Guam for this event.

In order to accommodate this large increase in international visitor arrivals, I respectfully request that CBP surge additional officers to the Guam International Airport Authority in the dates leading up to and during FESTPAC. I am concerned that the current CBP force may be strained by the additional visitor traffic, and I believe that temporarily increasing CBP officers on island is necessary to ensure tolerable visitor arrival wait times. I know that this something CBP and DHS have done at other locations on the mainland U.S. and Hawaii to accommodate large scale sporting and civic events.

Furthermore, there continues to be a systemic issue of long wait times for foreign visitors into Guam International Airport. This is an issue that goes beyond the need for a surge of capabilities to support FESTPAC. I appreciate that CBP installed Global Entry kiosks for US visitors. However, I hope that you can work with the Guam International Airport and seriously explore the ability of establishing automatic kiosks that could expedite foreign visitors who have registered with ESTA to help reduce wait times at Guam International Airport. This would be similar to technologies that can be found at many major mainland international airports like Dulles International Airport and Chicago O'Hare International Airport, to name a few.

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As you know, the President signed a memorandum on May 22, 2014 that calls on the Departments of Commerce and Homeland Security to establish a national goal and airport-specific action plans at our largest airports to enhance the arrivals process for international travelers to the United States. I am not aware of any specific action plan for Guam and would urge that one be developed that incorporate automatic technology that can expedite the travel experience on Guam. Ideally additionally CBP personnel could be stationed on Guam but I understand the fiscal constraints that may not make that solution workable in the long-term, which is why automated technologies is one potential solution or better staffing of positions during peak arrival times on Guam.

Guam is consistently ranked, according to statistics from Office of Travel and Tourism Industries in the U.S. Department of Commerce, as a top U.S. port for foreign visitors. In fact, over the last several years Guam ranked in the top ten destinations for foreign visitors coming to the United States so addressing backlogs and severe wait times for foreign visitors should be a priority. Unfortunately, data that was provided to me by the GVB for the month of November 2015 indicates wait times; a certain periods averaging 100 minutes and some waits were over 180 minutes. GVB indicates that similar challenges have been occurring for years and that is not acceptable or conducive to a friendly customer experience. Guam heavily relies on our tourism economy for our well-being and we must do all that we can to enhance foreign visitors experience at the airport.

I appreciate your consideration of this request, and I hope that CBP will provide additional officers to the Guam International Airport Authority to support FESTPAC. I also hope to work with you to address the long-term and systemic issues with wait times for foreign visitors. Should you have any questions or concerns, your staff my contact my Legislative Assistant, Jason McMahon, at jason.mcmahon@mail.house.gov or at 202-225-1188.

Sincerely,


MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO
Member of Congress